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ABSTRACT

As part of an empirical search for a practical self-concept scale that can be used with preschool children, the Self-Description Questionnaire (SDQ-I) was administered to a pilot group of kindergarten students in a rural Tennessee town. The study replicated the use of the SDQ-I with kindergarten children in Australia, which had demonstrated evidence of multi-dimensional self-concept in kindergartners. In the current study, the SDQ-I was administered to 25 Head Start and 26 non-Head Start children at the beginning of their kindergarten year. The children's parents and eight teachers were administered the Coopersmith Behavior Rating Form. Parents also completed the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale. Testing with the SDQ-I demonstrated no significant correlations with academic measures or with teacher behavior ratings. There were, however, significant correlations with parent behavior ratings. No significant differences were found between Head Start and non-Head Start children, with most of the children in both groups reporting extremely high self-concepts. Future directions include the modification of the items in the original SDQ-I to reduce the amount of administration time. The 64 items in the SDQ-I make the test prohibitively long for use with preschoolers, especially in conjunction with other tests. (AC)

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Preschool Self-Concept in Head Start and Non-Head Start Children

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ABSTRACT

Over the years a large number of measures have been developed to assess self-concept, self-esteem, self-understanding and other related constructs. By in large the measures have focused on subjects between the ages of 8 and 50. Very few exist that effectively tap into the self-concept of the preschool child. This study utilizes a scale that has recently been used effectively with preschool children in Australia, the Self-Description Questionnaire (SDQ-I) (Marsh, 1992). The children in this study were 51 kindergarten children from a rural Tennessee town. Head Start and Non-Head Start children were administered the SDQ-I at the beginning of their kindergarten year. Teachers and parents were administered the Coopersmith Behavior Rating Form (Coopersmith, 1967). Testing with the SDQ-I demonstrated no significant correlations with academic measures or teacher behavior ratings. There were, however, significant correlations with parent behavior ratings. No significant differences were found between Head Start and Non-Head Start children. Future directions include modification of the items in the original SDQ-I in order to reduce the amount of administration time.

Introduction

This study is an empirical search for a practical self-concept scale that can be utilized with preschool children. There are currently many practical problems that face a researcher who is trying to study self-concept in preschool children. First, it is difficult to ascertain whether children understand the tasks they are asked to complete. For example, one of the criticisms of the Harter Perceived Competence in Young Children scale is that the children are unable to identify with the pictures of children and adults in the pictures and respont inappropriately to them (Ramey, 1992). Other techniques that have been used with little effect are polaroid pictures, children's drawings of themselves, faces depicting smiles and frowns, and Q-sort task (Walker, 1973). All of these methods have failed to obtain clear results. Other researchers have found that simply asking children questions in easy to understand language can help obtain valid results (Mischel, Zeiss, & Zeiss, 1974). Even with this method, however, researchers must be careful to present the available responses in such a way as to avoid the child repeating the last word they hear.

The second practical concern is the amount of time that it takes to administer an instrument to a preschooler. Children at this age have very short attention spans and any instrument being utilize should be as short as possible. Brevity, however, is usually detrimental to reliability so it can be difficult to create a short instrument that is highly reliable.

This study begins the process of creating an instrument that can address the concerns mentioned above. A well researched instrument, the Self-Description Questionnaire, has

recently been used with kindergarten children in Australia (Marsh, Craven, & Debus, 1991). The investigators were able to generate a significant 8 factor model with the data they obtained. Hence, this study provided rare, but encouraging, evidence of mult-dimensional self-concept in kindergartners. The only problem with this instrument is that it is 64 items long and not practical to use in a testing situation in which other instruments or tests are also utilized. Therefore, a reduced set of questions needs to be obtained for those researchers who would like to utilize this instrument in conjunction with other instruments. In order to create this instrument, however, the original instrument was administered to a pilot group of students in order to determine whether the results from the Marsh study could be replicated in America. That is the purpose of the current study.

PURPOSE

One of the primary goals of the Head Start Transition Demonstration Project is to help foster and enhance children's self-concept. Therefore, in order to evaluate whether the program has succeeded in this goal, some measure of self-concept is needed. Hence, it is the goal of the present study to utilize an instrument (SDQ-I) that has recently been used effectively with kindergarten children in Australia to measure self-concept in Head Start and Non-Head Start children (Marsh, Craven, & Debus, 1991). This study looked at hypothesized correlates of child self-concept (parent and teacher ratings and parent's self-esteem) as well as correlations with academic measures. Specifically, this study obtained information on the following questions:

- Are there any significant correlations between SDQ-I measures and parent and teacher rating scales?

- Is there a relationship between parents' self-esteem and children's self-concept?
- Is there a relationship between children's academic scores and their self-concept?
- Is there a significant difference between Head Start and Non-Head Start children's self-concept for this population?

METHODS

SUBJECTS AND INSTRUMENTS:

51 kindergarten children and their parents from a rural Tennessee town participated in this study. Head Start and Non-Head Start children were matched on SES, classroom, and sex. Two schools participated in the study, one was a Transition Demonstration site and the other was the comparison site. Children were tested at school for approximately 30 minutes each. After each testing session the children were given a reward (sticker) for their participation. During the session the Woodcock-Johnson, the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test, and the Self-Description Questionnaire-I (Marsh, 1984) were administered.

The Self-Description Questionnaire-I is a 64 item questionnaire that is orally administered to 4 and 5 year olds. The child is first requested to answer "yes" or "no" that they agree with a statement. Secondly, they are asked if it happens "sometimes" or "always". If a child has difficulty with a question, then they are asked if they understand the question. No further questions are asked unless the evaluator can ascertain that the child understands what is being asked.

Parents were interviewed in a 1 hour session at either the school or their home. The interview contained instruments pertaining to family life, health issues, and family

relationships. Included in the interview was the Rosenberg Self-Esteem scale (Rosenberg, 1965) and the Coopersmith Behavior Rating Scale (Coopersmith, 1967).

Eight teachers participated in this study. They were asked to complete a Coopersmith Behavior Rating Form on each child in their classroom who was a participant in this study All instruments in this study and their reliablities are presented in Table 1.

RESULTS

Descriptive statistics for each of the instruments used in this study are presented in Table 2. This table demonstrates a near normal distribution of scores for the Rosenberg and the Coopersmith scales. However, the preschool self-concept scale is highly skewed with numbers clustered around the high end of the scale.

Correlations matrices are presented in Tables 3 and 4 show the relationships between the self-concept measure, parent self-esteem, parent and teacher behavior ratings, and academic measures. Briefly, the correlations demonstrate that the parent behavior rating form was significantly correlated with many of the sub-scales in the preschool self-concept measure. There were, however, no significant results found for the teacher behavior measure, the parent self-esteem measure (Rosenberg) or the academic measures.
An ANOVA summary table (Table 5) is presented in order to test for differences between Head Start and Non-Head Start children in this study. The ANOVA demonstrates that their is no significant difference between these groups on the self-concept measure.

RELIABILITIES FOR MEASURES IN THE STUDY

Scales	Cronbach Alpha
Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSE)	.84
Coopersmith Behavioral Rating Form (Parent-PBRF)	.80
Coopersmith Behavioral Rating Form (Teacher-TBRF)	.64
Self-Description Questionnaire (SDQ-I):	
Physical Abilities	.71
Physical Appearance	.81
Peer Relations	.83
Parent Relations	.77
Reading	.86
Mathematics	.90
General-School	.93
General-Self	.80

Table 1

DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS FOR MEASURES IN THE STUDY

MEASURES	Range	Mean	Standard Deviation	Kurtosis	Skewness
Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSE)	10-40	33.0	4.7	-0.79	0.35
Parent Behavior Rating Form (PBRF)	13-65	42.5	6.9	-0.66	0.03
Teacher Behavior Rating Form (TBRF)	13-65	48.7	6.8	-0.31	-0.06
Self-Description Questionnaire-I (SDQ-I)	8-40	35.5	4.7	6.01	-2.34

Note: All scales are scored so that the higher the score the higher the self-concept or self-esteem.

Table 2

Measures	RSE	TBRF	PBRF	Phys. Abil.	Phys. App.	Peer Rel.	Parent Rel.	Reading	Math	General School	General Self	Teach Self-Est	Parent Self-Est
Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSE)	1.00												
Teachear Behav. Rating Form (TBRF)	0.21	1.00											
Parent Behav. Rating Form (PBRF)	0.38**	0.22	1.00										
Physical Abilities (SDQ-I)	0.10	0.24	0.30*	1.00									
Physical Appearance (SDQ-I)	0.19	0.12	0.45***	0.63***	1.00								
Peer Relations (SDQ-I)	0.15	0.13	0.39***	0.67***	0.76***	1.00							
Parent Relations (SDQ-I)	0.23	0.21	0.46***	0.73***	0.82***	0.80***	1.00						
Reading (SDQ-I)	0.14	0.10	0.37***	0.62***	0.59***	0.61***	0.62***	1.00					
Mathematics (SDQ-I)	0.08	0.08	0.13	0.47***	0.58***	0.61***	0.70***	0.50***	1.00				
General-School (SDQ-I)	0.06	0.13	0.39***	0.67***	0.76***	0.77***	0.83***	0.75***	0.84***	1.00			
General-Self (SDQ-I)	0.15	0.18	0.47***	0.68***	0.72***	0.76***	0.83***	0.76***	0.58***	0.77***	1.00		
Teacher Rating-Self-Esteem	0.17	0.73***	0.34*	0.21	0.15	0.26	0.28*	0.28*	0.20	0.33*	0.27	1.00	
Parent Rating Self-Esteem	0.45***	0.06	0.45***	-0.13	0.07	0.10	0.10	0.01	0.14	0.16	0.10	0.26	1.00

Note: * = $p < .05$
** = $p < .01$
*** = $p < .001$

Table 3

CORRELATIONS BETWEEN CHILDREN'S SELF-CONCEPT MEASURES AND ACADEMIC MEASURES

MEASURES	Physical Abil. (SDQ-I)	Physical App. (SDQ-I)	Peer Relat. (SDQ-I)	Parent Relat. (SDQ-I)	Reading (SDQ-I)	Mathematics (SDQ-I)	General-Sch (SDQ-I)	General-Self (SDQ-I)
Woodcock-John.† Letter-Word Ident.	0.01	0.17	0.03	0.12	0.13	0.12	0.13	0.12
Woodcock-John.† Passage Compre.	0.12	0.20	-0.02	0.14	0.03	-0.02	0.02	0.07
Woodcock-John.† Calculation	0.13	0.14	0.21	0.17	0.10	0.16	0.16	0.20
Woodcock-John.† Applied Problems	0.10	-0.07	0.02	0.03	-0.04	-0.04	0.04	0.09
Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test††	0.20	0.14	0.22	0.16	0.16	0.16	0.20	0.26

† Woodcock-Johnson Form A was used.
†† PPVT Form L was used.

Table 4

ANALYSIS OF VARIANCE SUMMARY TABLE COMPARING HEAD START AND NON-HEAD START CHILDREN'S SELF-CONCEPT

Source	DF	SS	MS	F ratio	F Prob.
Between Groups	1	47.93	47.93	2.14	0.15
Within Groups	49	1097.32	22.40		
Total	50	1145.25			

DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS FOR HEAD START AND NON-HEAD START CHILDREN'S SELF-CONCEPT

	N	M	SD
Head Start	25	34.5	5.2
Non-Head Start	26	36.4	4.2

Table 5

CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Initially, the purpose of this study was to replicate, in America, a self-concept instrument that had been used effectively with preschool children in Australia. A secondary purpose was to test whether any self-concept differences existed between Head Start and Non-Head Start children who were beginning their kindergarten year.

This study showed no significant difference between the Head Start and Non-Head Start children. This appears to have been due to a ceiling effect, since most of the children in both groups reported extremely high self -concepts.

One possible explanation for the ceiling effect may be that the length and repetitiveness of the instrument is too overwhelming given the particular research setting. The instrument was administered concurrently with 2 academic measures, the Woodcock-Johnson and the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test. Child interviewers expressed their dislike of the length of the SDQ-I (64 items) and reported that the children seemed to feel that they were answering the same question over and over. The children's inability to distinguish the questions from each other may have resulted in the inflated mean and skewed distribution that was observed in this study.

Another possible explanation is that the preschool children have inflated ideas of their abilities. That may explain the low correlations found between the teachers' behavior reports and the children's self-concept scores.

In order to test the first possibility, the SDQ-I is being revised. Basically, a 64 item measure is not feasible to administer with other measures during an interview session.

Preschool children are unable to attend to the task, even with prompting, for the amount of time that it takes to administer the questionnaire. Future studies will demonstrate whether the new, shortened measure will obtain better results.

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